



WOMEN OF COLOR IN THE ARTS

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Immigrant Artist Initiative
Recommendations for Immigrant Artist Convening
prepared by Kaisha S. Johnson

Clarifying Purpose and Intent of Initiative

Before, during and after initial convening, it is imperative that Dance/NYC articulates why they have embarked on an initiative centered on immigrant dance artists and how they plan to undertake it. Specifically, Dance/NYC must be able to answer the question of why Dance/NYC is equipped and ready to tackle such an initiative that involves a very broad, but specific spectrum of the New York City artscape. There should also be transparency around the intent of how the initiative can/will benefit individual immigrant artists and arts professionals, and the communities they represent and serve, and how the initiative can/will directly benefit Dance/NYC.

Rethinking Approaches to Planning

Whatever has felt routine in creating a gathering around thought dialogue and output-oriented activities should be reframed. Reevaluating normative practices of non-profit organizations is critical. The importance of avoiding the replication of colonial models cannot be overstated. Immigrant dance leaders should be central in discussion, evaluation, and action, so as to avoid White academics and White arts administrators falling into the role of shaping the conversations of the convening and the overall initiative's goals and development. If need be, engage a group such as AORTA (Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance) at the helm of the project, in establishing democratic processes for ongoing meetings and creating sustainable models for re-centering immigrant leaders of dance.

Meeting People Where They Are

Paramount to the idea of a convening which serves immigrant communities is a gathering centered where people are. Holding a convening in Manhattan that is convenient for the organizer subscribes to the standard operating "business as usual" model. Holding a convening in the outer boroughs where large numbers of diverse populations reside signals to a community that there is a real intent for investment in that community. Holding a convening of immigrant artists in the borough of Queens, having the highest population of immigrants from around the world, would be ideal in this inaugural Dance/NYC convening.

Utilizing Existing Resources

The greatest resource Dance/NYC has is the immigrant arts professional. Assembling a task force to help shape the immigrant artist initiative is a first step. However, Dance/NYC must be thoughtful and intentional on who they are bringing into the room. Having a task force filled with foreign-born artists that do NOT identify as immigrants serves no one. Having a task force that is filled with those that self-identify as immigrants who came to the United States exclusively for artistic pursuits is equally unbeneficial. Having a task force that is comprised of arts professionals that self-identify as immigrants and have come to the United States for a varying array of reasons is the goal. Having a task force whose members represent diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, distinct professional backgrounds, and varied U.S. residency statuses will successfully lead to an inclusive group comprised of people with multi-faceted perspectives and points of view.

Recognizing The Importance of Self-Determination

Arts organizations must realize that they exist to be of service to artists and communities. Harkening to the need to value and build trust in communities with the intent of strengthening relationships, is the principle of self-determination. Immigrant artists must be able to define, name and speak for themselves. Sharing one's own history and creating one's own narrative and being able to openly articulate what is beneficial for their own self-development is central to the principle of self-determination. One of the essential components of a gathering of immigrant artists should be to involve the artists directly in the process of project and program development, curation, assessment, and future research and planning. One way should be to begin conversations about the intended purpose of the Dance/NYC immigrant artist initiative and convening, and allow artists to provide critical feedback about how such an initiative and convening would (or would not) serve their own needs and agendas.

Valuing Participants

Demonstrating that member participation is truly valued is the key to a successful convening and initiative. Referring to participants as "member partners" could be prime to creating a way to value participants. Finding ways to compensate all participants, even through gift cards of \$20 to \$30, could go a long way towards making immigrant artists and arts professionals feel that their participation and time is, in fact, valued. Gift cards are useful because it evades any discussion about immigration and documentation status. (*The NYC Department of Consumer Affairs Paid Care Division has paid people this way for focus group participation around labor issues.*) Offering participants an active and paid role in the program development and research, even if the role is temporary and the pay is minimal, will build trust and reinforce that participants' time and intellectual capital is valued. Participants should be invited to serve as survey administration proctors, translators, site hosts, evaluators, observers, self-documenters, technical support personnel, co-interviewers, co-interviewees, etc. Inviting participants to other Dance/NYC gatherings or convenings (including those that do not directly relate to the Immigrant Artist Initiative) will only enable participants to feel invested in the work of

Dance/NYC and create a potential opening for arts professionals to talk with other arts professionals about the importance of Dance/NYC's work.

Building Trust

Taking an open-ended approach to listening to the observations and recommendations that participants and member partners offer, and continuing to negotiate how best to honor and act upon these recommendations, is a crucial way to build trust. The more democratic the gathering and process of convening is, the more trust and buy-in may emerge. A series of catered social gatherings may also help establish trust and buy-in *before* a large communal gathering. Holding small convenings initiated in partnership with Dance/NYC in communities where large populations of immigrant artists reside could be an effective method of establishing trust. Intimate gatherings in The Bronx, Brooklyn, Staten Island, Queens and upper Manhattan with trusted arts partners would be beneficial to creating new relationships and strengthening existing ones. Wherever possible, group activities at these gatherings should be led by those who are immigrant dance professionals.

Utilizing Pilot Survey as a Guide

WOCA piloted a survey in December 2017 which garnered a small sampling of those self-identified immigrant arts professionals. One way to further the outcomes of the immigrant artist initiative and convening would be to ask artists to provide concrete feedback and critique of the existing survey that WOCA piloted. Conversations could happen at the aforementioned smaller borough-wide gatherings and dialogue should begin around the purpose of the Dance/NYC initiative. Again, it would be necessary to allow immigrant arts professionals to provide critical feedback about how such an initiative would (or would not) serve their own needs and agendas. Direct, interpersonal interaction is needed to fully engage the community and further establish trust and reinforce the value Dance/NYC sees in its potential community members. A larger scale conversation around the purpose of a Dance/NYC initiated survey could be held at the larger convening in September.

Surfacing Shared Agreements of Engagement

For everyone to operate from the same starting point, a set of shared agreements should be articulated at convenings. Shared agreements outline how Dance/NYC intends to engage with community and under what values Dance/NYC operates. This will lay the foundation of how all future engagements between communities and Dance/NYC will be realized. It is important to realize that shared agreements should be crafted and/or co-signed by community. Some suggestions of language for shared agreements include:

- Meet one another where they are.
- Never make assumptions.
- Value each other's values.
- Always walk in patience and understanding.

Creating Pathways of Accessibility

If Dance/NYC truly wants to engage immigrant artists and their communities, then translation services must be offered for the most dominant languages that will be present at the convening. A proper assessment of who will be present at the convening will be key but as a guidepost – Spanish and Chinese should be offered. Members of the task force or other key initiative participants could be paid to provide these services. Also, imperative to pathways of accessibility, is making sure that everyone has the economic ability to attend a Dance/NYC immigrant artist convening. If a fee structure for entry is being planned, ensure that immigrant artists, particularly those not working under the auspices of an organization or institution, have access to free or very low-cost registration. Creating access is more than just opening the door to let someone in. Creating access is about leveling the plane which will allow someone to enter through that door.